

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13 OMB-01 CU-04 HA-05
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R 250320Z JAN 78
FM USLO PEKING
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INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM
AMEMBASSY HELSINKI
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RANGOON
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 PEKING 0228

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: SHUM, SOCI, PBOR, CB, VM
SUBJ: PEKING-BASED AMBASSADORS' TRIP TO PHNOM PENH

REFS: A) COPENHAGEN 490; B) PEKING 63

1. SUMMARY: PEKING-BASED AMBASSADORS RECENTLY RETURNED
FROM TWO-WEEK VISIT TO PHNOM PENH DESCRIBE CITY AS VIRTUALLY
DESERTED, BUT SAW NO INDICATION OF A MILITARY ALERT.
CAMBODIAN DEPUTY PREMIER IENG SARY GAVE CONFIDENT PRESENTATION
IN WHICH HE SHRUGGED OFF THE INITIAL LOSS OF LIFE
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AFTER THE COMMUNIST TAKEOVER IN 1975 AND CLAIMED THAT
CAMBODIAN FORCES COULD HANDLE THE VIETNAMESE THREAT. END SUMMARY.

2. AT MY REQUEST, FINNISH AMBASSADOR SUOMELO GAVE ME
RUNDOWN OF HIS IMPRESSIONS OF THE JANUARY 7-21 VISIT
TO CAMBODIA BY HIM AND THE AMBASSADORS OF DENMARK,
SWEDEN, TANZANIA AND IRAQ. HE DESCRIBED PHNOM PENH

AS A VIRTUALLY EMPTY CITY. HE SPOTTED YOUNG WORKERS COMING INTO THE CITY IN THE MORNING TO DO CLEAN-UP AND MAINTENANCE WORK, AND HAD THE IMPRESSION THEY RETURNED EVERY EVENING TO THEIR HOMES IN THE COUNTRYSIDE. THERE WERE NO TROOPS VISIBLE IN PHNOM PENH, AND NO SIGN OF AIR DEFENSE MEASURES AT POCHENTONG AIRPORT. NO TRAINS OR BUSES WERE RUNNING, AND THERE WERE FEW CARS OR TRUCKS IN EVIDENCE. NO CROWDS LINED THE STREETS FOR THE ARRIVAL OF CHINESE EMISSARY TENG YING-CHAO - AT ONE INTERSECTION A POLICEMAN'S "CROWD CONTROL" CONSISTED OF STOPPING SUOMELA'S WIFE AND ONE CAMBODIAN CYCLIST TO ALLOW TENG CONVOY TO PASS.

3. THE AMBASSADORS MET SEPARATELY WITH DEPUTY PREMIER/ FOREIGN MINISTER IENG SARY, AFTER WHICH THE THREE SCANDINAVIAN ENVOYS WERE GRANTED ANOTHER SESSION WITH HIM. SUOMELA DESCRIBED IENG SARY AS RELAXED AND CONFIDENT IN THESE MEETINGS. IN ANSWER TO DANISH AMBASSADOR MORTENSEN'S QUESTION ABOUT THE INITIAL COMMUNIST TAKE-OVER, HE STATED THAT SINCE LON NOL HAD HAD 130,000 TROOPS IN AND AROUND PHNOM PENH AT THE TIME OF ITS FALL, THE VICTORS FELT THEMSELVES OUTNUMBERED AND HAD NO CHOICE BUT TO EVACUATE THE CITY. IN ALL ABOUT 2 MILLION CAMBODIAN CITY DWELLERS HAD BEEN MOVED TO THE COUNTRYSIDE. NATURALLY SOME HAD DIED, SINCE THEY WERE UNUSED TO THE RIGORS OF COUNTRY LIFE. SARY STATED THAT

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NO MORE THAN 2000 LON NOL SUPPORTERS WERE KILLED BY COMMUNIST TROOPS. ASKED ABOUT THE FATE OF THE ESTIMATED 350,000 ETHNIC CHINESE WHO HAD INHABITED CAMBODIAN TOWNS BEFORE 1975, HE REPLIED THAT THEY HAD ALL GONE TO HONG KONG OR MACAU.

4. RESPONDING TO SWEDISH AMBASSADOR BJORK'S QUESTION ABOUT THE OPERATION OF A NON-MONETIZED ECONOMY, SARY STATED THAT SINCE THE LON NOL FORCES HAD HAD MUCH MONEY, THE NEW GOVERNMENT HAD DECIDED TO ABOLISH IT. ALL TRANSACTIONS ARE NOW DONE BY BARTER, AS WHEN A PEASANT COOPERATIVE TRADES RICE FOR A TRACTOR. THE RATE OF EXCHANGE, HE SAID, IS BASED ON THE EXPORT PRICES OF THE COMMODITIES INVOLVED. (SUOMELA MENTIONED THAT THE BANK, WHICH WAS BLOWN UP BY COMMUNIST FORCES, STILL LAY IN RUINS, AND THAT MONEY COULD BE SEEN LYING UNUSED IN THE STREETS.)

5. SUOMELA ASKED IENG SARY ABOUT THE POSSIBILITIES OF TRADE, AND WAS TOLD THAT ALTHOUGH CAMBODIA WOULD LIKE TO TRADE, THERE WAS LITTLE THAT IT NEEDED FROM THE OUTSIDE WORLD. SARY CLAIMED THE VIETNAMESE HAD TRIED

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

TO FORCE CAMBODIA TO TAKE US AID (PERHAPS MEANING
THAT CAMBODIA, LIKE VIETNAM, SHOULD HAVE CLAIMED REPARATIONS).
CAMBODIA, HOWEVER, DID NOT NEED AID FROM ANYONE, AND COULD EVEN
DO WITHOUT CHINESE ASSISTANCE.

6. SARY DID NOT DWELL ON THE WAR WITH VIETNAM.
ACCORDING TO SUOMELA, HE ADMITTED THAT CAMBODIAN
TROOPS HAD BEEN PUSHED BACK INITIALLY BY THE VIET-
NAMESE, BUT HAD COUNTERATTACKED AND CROSSED THE
BORDER IN SOME PLACES. HE EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE IN
ULTIMATE VICTORY.
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7. THE AMBASSADORS ASKED FOR PERMISSION TO SEE SIHANOUK, BUT WERE TOLD THAT HE WAS CURRENTLY IN THE COUNTRYSIDE "INSPECTING RICE PADDIES."

8. THE AMBASSADORS' TRIP TO ANGKOR WAT WAS TAKEN BY BUS, AND GIVES SOME FLAVOR OF THE PHNOM PENH REGIME. ONE OF THEIR ESCORTS IN THE BUS WAS A SOLDIER WHO APPEARED TO BE ABOUT 25 YEARS OLD AND WHO SPENT MUCH OF HIS TIME SHOOTING BIRDS OUT OF THE WINDOW. THEY WERE LATER INFORMED HE WAS A GENERAL. DURING A STOP ALONGSIDE THE ROAD, AN APPROACHING JEEP APPARENTLY WENT OUT OF CONTROL AND ALMOST RAN OVER TANZANIAN AMBASSADOR LUSINDE AND HIS WIFE -- THE LATTER ENDED UP IN A DITCH. WHEN THE JEEP DRIVER TURNED AROUND IN RESPONSE TO CRIES FROM THE GROUP'S ESCORTS, THE SOLDIERS IN THE JEEP JUMPED OUT WITH RIFLES AT THE READY. AFTER A SULLEN CONVERSATION THEY LEFT WITHOUT A SINGLE WORD OF APOLOGY.

9. IN A SEPARATE CONVERSATION, AMBASSADOR LUSINDE OF TANZANIA GAVE ME HIS IMPRESSIONS OF THE TRIP. LUSINDE NOTED THAT CAMBODIA NOW SEEMS SOMEWHAT MORE RELAXED THAN DURING HIS PREVIOUS VISIT IN LATE 1976. THERE ARE FEWER SOLDIERS IN PHNOM PENH, AND MORE CIVILIANS. WORKERS STILL MARCH IN SINGLE FILE, BUT APPEAR LESS TENSE THAN FORMERLY. IN THE COUNTRYSIDE ONE CAN NOW SEE PEOPLE AROUND THE HOUSES IN THE MORNINGS, WHEREAS IN 1976 ALL THE HOUSES HE SAW APPEARED DESERTED. NEVERTHELESS, THE NATION IS STILL ORGANIZED LIKE AN ARMY, AND THE PEOPLE ARE WORKING EXTREMELY HARD. HE WAS TOLD 2 MILLION HECTARES OF LAND ARE UNDER RICE CULTIVATION, WITH A YIELD OF 3 TONS PER HECTARE. EACH CAMBODIAN, REGARDLESS OF AGE, IS SUPPOSEDLY GIVEN ONE

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KILO OF RICE PER DAY, APPARENTLY IN COOKED FORM. LUSINDE SAW NO SIGN OF ANY CLINIC OR HOSPITAL DURING HIS STAY.

10. AFTER HIS RETURN FROM ANGKOR WAT, LUSINDE HAD 5 HOUR TALK WITH IENG SARY, WHOM HE DESCRIBED AS VERY INTELLIGENT. SARY DESCRIBED THE BORDER CONFLICT AS INCIDENTAL TO VIETNAM'S AMBITION TO DOMINATE CAMBODIA, REPEATING MANY TIMES "THEY DESPISE US." LUSINDE BELIEVES RECENT KHMER SUCCESSES ARE DUE TO A SWITCH TO GUERRILLA TACTICS IN THE FACE OF THE VIETNAMESE INVASION.

11. IN ANOTHER CONVERSATION, BURMESE EMBOFF WHO TRAVELLED TO PHNOM PENH IN NOVEMBER HAS DESCRIBED CITY TO USLO OFFICER AS A "GHOST TOWN." WOMEN AND

CHILDREN ARE RARELY SIGHTED IN THE CITY. IN WHAT IS
APPARENTLY PHNOM PENH'S ONLY STORE, MAINTAINED FOR
DIPLOMATS, TRANSACTIONS ARE CONDUCTED ONLY IN US
DOLLARS. ALL OTHER TRANSACTIONS BETWEEN DIPLOMATS AND THE
CAMBODIAN GOVERNMENT ARE LIKEWISE HANDLED IN DOLLARS OR ON A
CREDIT BASIS.
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